

# History of the Human Rights Commission

The City of Kansas City, Mo., by City Council resolution formed its first Mayor's Human Relations Commission in the 1940s. The Commission sought to end the manifest segregation in Kansas City in concert with other groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE), etc., throughout the 1950s and 60s.

Racial tension in Kansas City came to the boiling point in April of 1968 following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The community exploded in civil insurrection. As a result, the Kansas City Council in May of 1968 created the Human Relations Department and codified the Mayor's Human Relations Commission.

In 1981, the City Council recognized that the city needed to provide a remedy for individual victims of discrimination because the Mayor's Human Relations Commission had no remedial powers. Subsequently, the Civil Rights Board was to operate in concert with the Human Relations Commission to provide a method to administratively adjudicate individual complaints of employment, housing, and public accommodations discrimination.

Also in 1981, the Mayor's Human Relations Commission was re-codified as a seven-member body to review a variety of human rights problems and recommend appropriate action to the City Council. Examples of this included:

- The creation of a city workforce affirmative action plan; and
- The inclusion of minority and women business enterprise goals on economic development projects not funded by the city, but providing tax incentives.

In 1989, the Missouri Legislature granted powers to charter cities, such as Kansas City, to enforce the state's anti-discrimination statutes through the local Human Relations Commission.

In 1994, the City Council passed the Civil Rights Ordinance creating in its current form the Human Rights Commission. The Commission consists of seven members appointed by the Mayor. The Commission is a local commission as authorized by statute RSMo. 213.020 and 213.135 and as such has the power and authority to hear complaints of violations of RSMo. Chapter 213 in accordance with procedures set forth by the statute.

The Mayor recognized that beyond the adjudicatory powers identified by state statute, the Human Rights Commission needed additional powers to review a variety of civil and human rights problems that continue to persist in Kansas City. To that end, the Kansas City Human Rights Commission has also been given many powers and authorities.